TRICorporation

Experiential Leadership and Simulation Programs
Improved decision-making. Enhanced performance. Exceptional results.

SYNOPSYS®

Overview

Country or Region: Worldwide

Industry: Software

Customer Profile
Synopsys, Inc. is a leader in electronic design automation (EDA) and semiconductor intellectual property (IP), delivering products and services that have accelerated innovation in the global electronics market for more than 25 years. Headquartered in Mountain View, California, the world's 15th largest software company has approximately 90 offices in locations throughout North America, Europe, Japan, Asia and India.

Business Situation
Founded in 1986 by technology pioneer Dr. Aart de Geus, Synopsys grew to global prominence on the strength of its technical leadership. The company recognized the need to invest in business leadership skills to support a successful, scalable global business.

Solution
In 2011, Synopsys retained TRI Corporation to develop and facilitate a small pilot program that would allow the company to test the waters before committing to an ongoing executive development effort. The overwhelmingly positive feedback generated by two consecutive pilot sessions resulted in a call to formalize and expand the program, and Synopsys set a goal to put more than 200 executives through the simulation between 2013 and 2014.

Benefits
- Increased business acumen and financial skills
- Enhanced decision-making skills
- Enabled networking across organizations, functions and regions

Tech Leader Synopsys Builds Business Leadership through Experiential Learning

"Synopsys is not one of TRI's largest clients, but we were treated as if we were their only client. In TRI, we found a willing partner and capable team that worked closely with us and took the time to get to know Synopsys and our business."

Heather Hoerdemann
Vice President, Talent and Leadership Development

Situation

With a large engineering population and a strong global reputation for innovation, Synopsys was known for its technical leadership. The company faced the need to improve the business and financial fluency of its executives across all functions and regions. However, a formalized executive development program was uncharted territory for the organization.

"We have a very strong engineering environment, and we wanted to really stretch them out of their comfort zones and live with the decisions they make," said Heather Hoerdemann, Vice President, Talent and Leadership Development for Synopsys. "We wanted to elevate the business acumen of all of our leaders. The simulation was an opportunity to reinforce the importance of rapid decision-making, practice agile learning, and get much more comfortable with ambiguity."

In 2011, Jan Collinson, Senior VP, Human Resources, gave Hoerdemann, who had recently moved into the VP Talent position, the green light to test the waters with a small group of executives.

Solution

TRI Corporation was already on Hoerdemann's radar as she set out to find an experiential learning partner, thanks to a strong recommendation from an industry contact and positive feedback from several Synopsys employees who had attended an open session of a TRI-facilitated manufacturing simulation. Upon retaining TRI, Hoerdemann said, "I found a willing partner and capable team that worked closely with me and took the time to get to know Synopsys and our business."

TRI's Software as a Service (SAAS) simulation served as the framework for the Synopsys program, which launched with a small pilot group in fall 2011, followed by a second small group that winter. In all, 59 Synopsys executives participated in the two sessions.

"We kept teams small so people couldn't hide. They had to participate," Hoerdemann said. "Initially it was challenging to get executives to participate in such a time-intensive and rigorous learning experience, but the feedback was coming back so positive that in 2013, we were given the green light to put 200 executives through the program over the course of a year."

CLO Learning in Practice Award Winner 2015

2015 CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER® LEARNING IN PRACTICE AWARDS WINNER

Synopsys' partnership with TRI resulted in a bronze Strategy Award for Hoerdemann in Chief Learning Officer's 2015 Learning in Practice awards program. According to CLO, the Strategy Award honors "learning executives who have demonstrated exceptional business acumen combined with forward-looking vision in the development and execution of a learning strategy in support of their organization's objectives in the past year."

TRICorporation

Solution (continued)

Between 2013 and 2014, TRI conducted simulations for cross-functional groups of directors and senior directors as well as two separate simulations for vice presidents. The programs brought together executives from Synopsys locations across the globe, representing engineering, marketing, sales, services, human resources and other functions.

Pre-work ensured a level playing field for all participants. Before arriving for the simulation, they reviewed videos of Synopsys executives outlining key issues in their respective areas and completed a finance essentials course presented by the organization's CFO.

For each simulation, participants were grouped into five teams of seven each, with a diverse representation of regions, job functions, years of service, and educational backgrounds. Each team took on the role of a newly hired leadership team tasked with transforming a failing global software business over six fiscal year quarters. Using extensive role play and facing leadership challenges that simulated Synopsys' real-world issues, teams focused on financial metrics to drive decisions and analyze results. The winning team was determined by its ability to establish a business plan and grow revenues, operating income, cash flow and return on equity.

Through the course of the simulation, teams learned to:

• Take decisive actions to execute strategy
• Understand the financial impact of decisions
• Improve areas of development
• Leverage strengths
• Provide timely, actionable feedback
• Create vision, set strategy, and communicate
• Manage interdependencies across functions
• Develop, coach, and motivate teams
• Better understand Synopsys' competition and customers

"In every simulation, we would stop mid-course and change it up, based on the skills of the group or what was going on in the organization," Hoerdemann said. "It was extremely nimble. Participants never knew what was coming next."

TRI facilitators provided real-time coaching and feedback to individuals and teams throughout the interactive role-play. Interspersed with the simulation activities were lectures and discussions facilitated by Synopsys executives from finance, engineering and the field. "Strategically we made this a very high-touch program," said Hoerdemann. "Each participant received special attention for the full time they were there, both from my team and from TRI, and everyone's individual needs were met."

During the debrief, each team member shared one key learning and committed to focus on developing that area in his or her current role at Synopsys.

"Throughout the process, TRI had an ability to think out of the box and connect me with the right people to enhance the learning," said Hoerdemann. For the vice president simulation, for instance, TRI introduced Hoerdemann to a theatrical-style troupe that presented leadership lessons from the life of Nelson Mandela. The program, called The Mandela Architecture, was thought provoking and well received.

Benefits

To date, more than 350 Synopsys directors, senior directors and vice presidents have completed the program. According to Hoerdemann, one of the most significant benefits has been a newfound sense of community. Participants not only learned to solve problems within the simulation, but they have kept in touch and continue to solve real issues together upon returning to their daily roles. The program enabled executives to get out of their silos and not only become aware of, but value, others' contributions, both functionally and technologically.

Another benefit? "It shrank the globe for us," said Hoerdemann. "We could shine the light on the talent that was outside of North America and they could be seen and make connections."

Participants themselves reported that the TRI simulation spurred "good/significant progress" in three crucial areas: Working and networking with cross-functional peers (100%); the ability to assess the risks and rewards of decision making (94%); and business acumen and financial skills (89%).

Among the key lessons they report:

• Better understanding of interaction of technical and financial decisions.
• Effective decision-making entails influencing key business leaders with the appropriate communication and questions at the right time.
• Better understanding of the financial models, investment and company strategy and how they are interrelated.
• Better understanding of how investment decisions are made and their impact on the company's top and bottom line.
• Learned how the size and effectiveness of the different aspects of the business (marketing, sales, R&D, support and G&A) are interrelated and how changes to one affect the other.

Concluded Hoerdemann, "Many of the executives I work with point to the TRI simulation as one of the most valuable development experiences of their career."

Participant Feedback

"Attract, retain, and care for the best people within a strong, learning-based culture. That's how we'll build a great company."
–Aart de Geus, Synopsys Co-CEO

"I learned how important it is to set clear strategies and goals that have broad team buy-in and follow those strategies consistently unless there is a clear reason to deviate."
–Participant